

» St. Louis Bird Club Bulletin «

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SAINT LOUIS BIRD CLUB

for the

Enjoyment, Study, and Conservation of Birds

VOLUME 6

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NUMBER 1

The January Meeting

The January meeting of our club centered its attention on an indoor field trip of the birds to be found in this region during the month. The trip was ably led by Mr. Tom Kirksey assisted by Mr. John P. Stupp.

New officers were also elected at this meeting, whose names occur elsewhere in this issue.

Dues Now Payable

The club membership starts with the new year. Those who have not sent in their dues are now in arrears. Please remit same to the secretary immediately.

Membership

Membership in the club gives you the advantage of personal participation in the enjoyment, study, and conservation of our birds.

It brings to you the Monthly Bulletin without further expense, a bulletin with the news of the club, information of state and Federal legislation and items of interest concerning birds throughout the world. With the help of your membership we are able to bring to St. Louis, from time to time, speakers of world wide fame.

Passer Montanus Montanus (Linn.)

European Tree Sparrow. Range: British Isles, Europe and Northern Siberia.

Introduced into the United States in 1870, at St. Louis, Mo., where it has become established. (A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, 1931).

More information regarding this bird is needed. Please report your observations and data to the observation department. The Educational Museum has several mounted specimens which were on display at the January indoor field trip.

Secrets of a Missouri Marsh

Surveying a nearly impenetrable Missouri marsh mallows for beauty' supremacy, a Little blue heron perches high in a mass of button-brush. In lower branches jerky-tailed green herons and one or two Black-crowned Night Herons seem busily occupied. But the key to the whole situation is this; noises of every description muffled croakings, intermittent "quarks", and squawks, loud cries and wailings, outbursts seemingly brimming with child-like grief--these spill the secret. I have discovered a heron rookery.

For the bird-lover there is always a peculiar thrill connected with a visit to heronries. Particularly was it characteristic of my visit to this virgin rookery located in St. Charles County in the path of the Mississippi flyway, near the junction of great Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Just twenty miles north of a city of 800,000 bustling human beings, St. Louis, here was an amazingly different life bubbling with relatively as much activity and half as much neurosis. Here in the middle of hundreds of acres, of knee-deep marsh was a city of several hundred citizens, densely populated in an area of much less than a square block. Here were air-cooled homes, each with water-frontage, roofed with button-brush! How ideal for the mechanics of carrying on the business of propagating a species.

But man, the census-taker, ever-curious about how many and how much, invaded this out of the way domain. The journey to the rookery, however, required an hours paddling and pushing in a small skiff through winding, marsh water-lanes. But this labor was

quickly rewarded when a host of American Egrets clad in white angel-garments, ascended from the lily-pads to vanish in the blue. A slender Least Bittern skimmed just above the reeds only to dive back suddenly to its retreat. Two hundred Great Blue Heron, however, went warily about their fishing, or flew to the safe margin ahead. The bell-clear song of a prairie Marsh Wren tingled the swamplands. And fifteen Wood Ducks in pairs or groups of three or four darted up at close range, though one mother kept to the water as 11 babes trailed Indian-file behind her.

But to the rookery! Resentment naturally followed my intrusion. The previously calmly perched Little Blue Heron and startling numbers of concealed Green and Night Herons bolted skyward, beginning an endless circling cuppled with honkings and "quarkings". Below, the button-brush was disorder and confusion. Little Green Herons, jerky-tailed as their mothers, scampered over twigs; fat and pudgy Black-crowned babies lay on their nests, tummies too crammed with crawfish to permit movement; and pearly white baby Little Blue Herons stood erect, scolding, ready to peck viciously at the intruder.

The census was more painstaking than expected. Strong shears afforded reasonable passageway, but progress gained by the shears was usually cut short by the water. However, eighty Green Heron nests were actually counted in an area of less than half an acre, and a very conservative estimate of 110 was made. There were five Little Blue Heron nests and an indefinite number of Night Herons', all from two to eight feet above water. Two important observations emanate from this census; the fact that one hundred and ten Green Heron nests were found rather disputes the theory that Green Herons do not nest in sizeable rookeries. True enough, this habitat is ad-

Wild-Life Principles

Restrict pollution, silting and excess salt at the river mouths. Provide more refuges, sanctuaries migratory-bird treaties, breeding grounds, wilderness areas.

Restrict "gatling-gun" hunting and fishing, both by commercial interests and sadists.

Educate sportsman.

The demand", says the Mississippi Valley Committee," for complete conservation or prohibition of all killing has led in certain instances to overstocking of areas with game and extensive starvation and disease because of lack of food.

Thus the deer on the Kaibab-plateau in Arizona were over-protected and they multiplied beyond their natural food supply. The balance of nature can be upset by overconservation as well as by under conservation.

But who can say that our game birds are in danger of overconservation. It would take several years of complete prohibition of all killing to produce overconservation.

How many of us who have hunted know of places where game was once plentyfull, where it does not exist today? Places where the Hawk and Owls were shot off long before the game became extinct. Places with plenty of food and cover and plenty of carrying capacity.

The hunters alone are to blame.

It will take years to bring back ducks, by the program which the Biological Survey has put into effect, that is by trying to keep the annual kill below the number produced each year.

The true sportsman realizes that there remains less than half the reserves which should be sent back north each spring, that three species of ducks--the redhead, the ringneck, and the lesser scaup--are all but extinct and other species are critically reduced.

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Riplettes

The black-throated blue is among the tamest of our wood warblers.

The oil gland at the base of the tail is a structure peculiar to birds and is the only purely external glandular apparatus that exists in them. It is absent in most struthious birds.

Birds usually have only one overy (the left).

The song of the Cape May is probably the thinnest and least musical of all the wood warblers.

In the three toed woodpecker, the first or great toe has disappeared. The outer toe has reversed or turned backward.

Dr. E. B. Coues has amusingly described the song of the prairie warbler as the plaint of a mouse with the toothache.

The lining of the gizzard may be ossified (bony) in certain pigeons.

The puffin and the auk periodically molt a portion of the bill.

The tail of the Japanese long-tailed fowl may reach a length of from twelve to twenty feet.

The number of eggs which a bird lays bears a definite relation to the amount of danger to which the species is exposed.

The greater the danger, with few exceptions, the larger is the batch.

A. M.

(Marsh Secrets-Continued from Page 2)

mittedly and unusually favorable one, yet there are streams, rivers and lakesides in abundance in this territory certainly conducive enough to solitary nesting. Secondly, the Little Blue Heron nesting record is two hundred miles further north than the only other published Missouri breeding record, which occurred in Butler County near the Arkansas line (cf. Bennitt's Check-list and the A. O. U. Check-list).

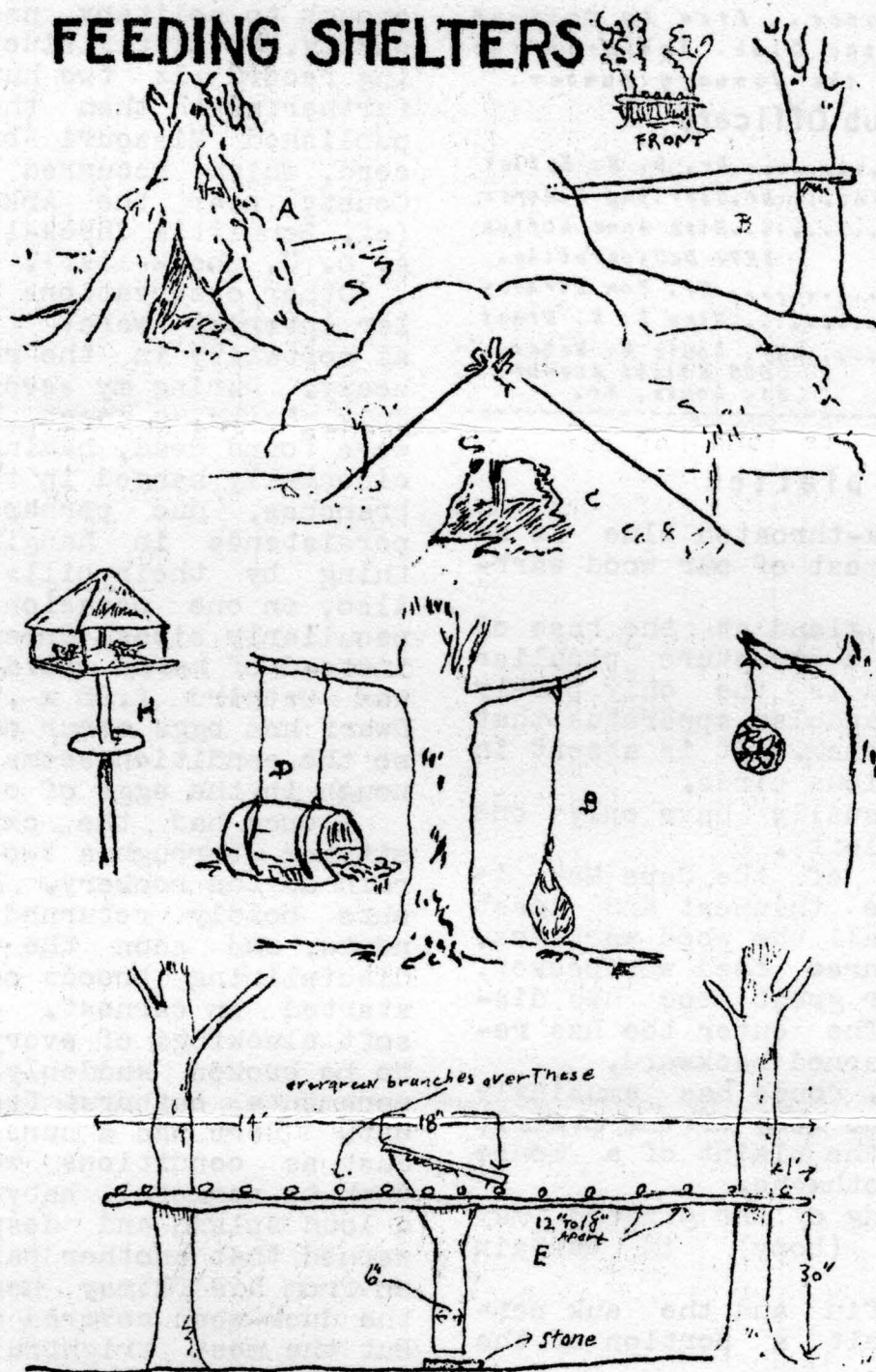
Other observations of particular interest were: accidental mortality in the rookery seems heavy. During my several June and July visits, a dozen baby herons were found dead, having been accidentally hanged in the forks of branches, due perhaps to their persistence in hanging to anything by their bills and necks. Also, on one occasion I found a peculiarly sized Green Heron egg. Instead of heron (1:45 x 1:10) it was Catbird (.95 x .70) size. Dwarf hen eggs occur occasionally, so the condition seems logical enough in the eggs of other birds.

I once had the experience of sitting through a two-hour light rain at the rookery. All the parents boldly returned to their nests, and soon the business of disciplining broods of youngsters started in earnest. There were soft cluckings of every sort, only to be broken suddenly by the temperamental outburst from some parent. Here was a nursery indeed! Just as conditions would settle down to peaceful baby-talk again, a loud splash and desperate cries warned that another babe had fallen from his flimsy heron nest to the duck-weed covered water below. But the most frightfully irritating element is the Red-Winged Blackbirds seem to be the devils of a herons existence.

Did you ever go slumming? Perhaps rookery odeurs should go unmentioned. But heronries are the slums of birddom. Whitewashed-nests play only a part. It is the regurgitation by their occupants that is interesting even if repugnant, interesting because of the

(Continued on Page 5 Column 2)

FEEDING SHELTERS



Personalia

Mr. and Mrs. A.F. Satterthwait, now of Urbana, Illinois, have been missed at our monthly meetings. Both Mr. and Mrs. Satterthwait did much to further the interests of the Bird Club.

Mr. Satterthwait was transferred to Urbana last summer. We hope the Satterthwait's will keep up their interests in our club and let us hear from them from time to time.

We were glad to see Dr. Louis H. Behrens at the annual meeting. Dr. Behrens was very ill during the summer.

Dr. Behrens is one of our most enthusiastic members when it comes to doing something for our wild ducks.

Brief Notes On New Books

Audubon, A delightful new biography of John James Audubon by Constance Rourke, author of "American Humor" and "Davy Crockett". Miss Rourke who has made a special study of the Audubon prints and the original paintings has included twelve colored plates, taken from the originals in the illustrations of the book. The illustrations make this a beautiful and valuable book for naturalists.

Rich Land, Poor Land by - Stuart Chase, considered by critics to be one of the best and most interesting books on the destruction and neglect of our natural resources, forest, grasslands, soil, streams and wildlife. Every conservationist should read this book.

The Ranger, Issued Monthly by Herbert C. Hanson, State College Station, Fargo, North Dakota.

The Ranger is a bulletin of recent developments in Ecology, Range and Pasture Management, Wildlife Management, Soil Conservation and Related Fields. It presents information that cannot otherwise be secured except by many hours of reading in a well-stocked library.

(Marsh Secrets-Continued from Page 3.)

"why" connected with it. Could the youngsters possess just that instinct making them aware of its repugnance to an enemy? But, more logically it seems the ordinary habit of herons to gorge during abundant food periods; but when the enemy appears, regurgitation takes place in order that the babe might lift itself and flee to higher branches.

But it's a quick slip back to the aesthetic - to the beauties of the birds themselves, all neat appearing, the baby Little Blues particularly white as the marsh lily itself, the adults, graceful in flight, light as the very marsh-reeds. And who could forget the blue-purple pickeral, the scarlet-throated marshmallow, and the delicate yellow lotus? -Wayne Short, St. Charles, Mo.

A "Field Catalog Of The Birds of the St. Louis Region" by Tom Kirksey may be obtained from Miss Elizabeth Golterman, secretary of the St. Louis Bird Club, Educational Museum, W. Bell at Channing, St. Louis. Its work covers field marks, haunts and habits, local habitats, seasonal status, comparative abundance, and migration dates. It is multigraphed on 5" x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " sheets, punched for carrying in a standard size loose-leaf pocket notebook in the field. Thus it eliminates the necessity of carrying several different references and manuals in the field.

Part 1 deals with the Large Wading Birds (Hérons, Egrets, Bitterns, etc.).

Part 2 deals with the family Fringillidae (excluding Sparrows).

Parts 3 and 4, on Sparrows, and Warblers, are now being made ready for publication.

Squaw Creek Refuge

Squaw Creek refuge near Mound City Mo. was developed by Civilian Conservation workers under the supervision of the Biological Survey. It was established on a one-time drainage district as a resting, feeding and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wild life.

Safety In Numbers?



SHOOTING WILD PIGEONS - (From a Sketch by Smith Bennet, July 3, 1875.)

In 1875, when the slaughter of passenger pigeons was becoming ominous, the legislature of Ohio considered a bill for their protection. A committee heard the testimony pro and con and reported as follows:

"The passenger pigeon needs no protection. Wonderfully prolific, having the vast forests of the north as its breeding ground, traveling hundreds of miles in search of food, it is here today and elsewhere tomorrow, and no ordinary destruction can lessen, them or be missed from the myriads that are yearly produced."

The last passenger pigeon died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. An extinct animal, like the passenger pigeon, can never be replaced by man. Pot hunters have exterminated the passenger pigeon and the heath hen. The sadistic breed of pot hunters, duly equipped with licenses and high-powered shotguns, turned the index down on our remaining birds. It has

been going down rapidly for the last fifteen years. At last accounts there were 5,738,000 licensed hunters in the country. Probably not one in five learned to be a sportsman.

The Flyways

Four great flyways have been identified by ornithologists, banding the country from Mexico to Canada. They have been named Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific. For these flyways birds have a deep ancestral instinct and they die rather than desert them. Heavy overshooting, drainage of marsh lands, agricultural activities, and drought have reduced the numbers of migratory waterfowl over the entire continent. If a species is exterminated on any one of the flyways, the region will remain barren. Birds of the same species on other flyways will not desert, their ancestral run.

NEXT ISSUE
ALL ABOUT
HAWKS AND
WHAT THEY
REALLY EAT

*



RED-SHOULDERED HAWK
ONE OF OUR FRIENDS

BIRD CLUB MEMBERSHIP DRIVE--If we quickly double our membership the "BULLETIN" can be issued every month with timely illustrations at nominal cost. Please detach this page and send to a friend with an urgent request to join.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ST. LOUIS BIRD CLUB is to promote bird enjoyment--bird study and bird conservation (ornithology in its broadest sense) among the people of St. Louis and vicinity. Any person in sympathy with the purpose of this Club is eligible to membership, and may be admitted on payment of dues to any of the following classes of membership:

Active \$1.00 () Sustaining \$5.00 () Life \$50 () Patron \$200 ()

Please enroll me in the class of membership checked. Enclosed find \$ _____

Name _____

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